



Design Review Working Group

Date: February 27, 2020

Time: 8:30 AM to 9:30 AM

Location: First Floor Conference Room, Town Hall Annex

Attendees: Wynelle Evans, Ann Forsyth, Wendy Richter, Pat Hanlon, Mike Ciampa, Emily Innes, Phillip Hu, Erin Zwirko.

Absent: Andrew Bunnell, Kelly Lynema.

Minutes

Phillip Hu and Emily Innes from Harriman presented on the existing conditions based on the conversation and field visit during the last meeting. Through the analysis, the key questions that the Working Group should consider are:

1. What are the key design issues and patterns that impact the identity of a neighborhood?
2. What are the different neighborhoods? What factors differentiate them from each other?
3. What is the current permitting process and where would design review be added to the existing process? How can we balance clear and understandable guidelines with flexibility?
4. How can design guidelines that balance the needs of homeowners to maintain and expand their homes in an economical way with the desire for updated and new houses to be consistent with their neighbors?

Phillip explained that his takeaway from the last meeting is that there are three design issues that should be explored:

1. Additions that do not fit the design context of the existing house and neighborhood
2. New Construction that is not in scale with the neighborhood
3. Parking that dominates the principal façade

In general, the Working Group thought that these three items were very important and likely the key design issues based on their opinions.

The Working Group then worked with Phillip and Emily to review and define “fuzzy” neighborhood boundaries. Harriman came up with 9 areas. Phillip provided an analysis of each of the 9 areas based on data in the Assessor’s database. The four areas explored was year built, the lot size, the residential floor area ratio, and the residential

“style” as defined by the database. Phillip noted that it can be challenging to develop guidelines with such diverse neighborhoods.

Moving on to an overview of the Zoning Bylaw, Phillip provided some details about the density and dimensional table and use table. He noted that since there is no floor area ratio maximum for single-family and two-family homes, the lot coverage creates a limit on density. Phillip also discussed how the Town could create a process that fits into the existing review and permitting process.

The conclusions the Harriman team wanted to share with the Working Group include:

1. Though much of the area of concern is zoned R0 and R1, the zoning does not fully capture the different identities between neighborhoods.
2. Many new constructions and additions do not fit with their context, particularly when a larger lot allows a much larger house than what was there originally.
3. The way new homes are designed reflect a change in lifestyle and tastes; for example, the attached garage reflects how important the automobile has become.
4. Small, older houses on large lots are generally most susceptible to change.

Moving onto the discussion, Ann noted that the zoning regulations may be preventing what we want to see in neighborhoods. She also noted that there should be some flexibility when addressing flooding.

The Working Group then spent some time discussing the boundaries that were proposed by Harriman. The Working Group discussed that there is some benefit to stay simple in terms of neighborhoods and requirements, so that the design guidelines are not overly complex and hard to use. The Working Group provided a lot of feedback to Harriman on the neighborhood boundaries. Members of the Working Group also thought that if the neighborhood boundaries are kept simple, it might be worth noting sub areas that should receive special consideration.

Members of the Working Group also suggested certain features that warrant extra consideration including corner lots, additions to older buildings, the first floor being a story above the street, and half stories. Topography was also discussed as an important feature of Arlington neighborhoods. Areas zoned R2 were also brought up as a concern. With small, older homes, these districts are a target for demolition and replacement with large, park under side-by-side duplexes. This results in a loss of green space around and between buildings. In East Arlington, up/down two-families are a traditional model (originally as owner-occupied buildings with an affordable rental unit), and are lost with condo conversion. The group also discussed multigenerational living, accessory dwelling units, setbacks that are greater than the minimum required for open/green space, and that good examples are invisible.

In discussing the neighborhood workshops, the Working Group recommended that there is an educational component to the workshops. Creating a survey with design preferences that could be used between the two workshops would be a benefit as well.

On the minutes from January 29, 2020, the Working Group unanimously approved the minutes.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM.